

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 SSO-00 INRE-00 NSCE-00
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AMEMBASSY KABUL
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AMCONSUL LAHORE
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
CINCPAC HONOLULU

C O N F I D E N T I A L ISLAMABAD 2744

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PK
SUBJECT: REACTION TO BHUTTO VERDICT

REF: A) ISLAMABAD 2691, B) ISLAMABAD 2528 C) ISLAMABAD 2294

1. LAW AND ORDER SITUATION- ONLY SCATTERED INCIDENTS
HAVE BROKEN THE CALM FOLLOWING THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE GUILTY
VERDICT AND DEATH SENTENCE IN BHUTTO TRIAL ON SATURDAY
MORNING 18 MARCH. (REF A). SIXTEEN PPP WORKERS ARRESTED
MARCH 18 IN RAWALPINDI FOR DEMONSTRATING AGAINST THE VERDICT
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HAVE ALREADY BEEN TRIED AND SENTENCED BY A MILITARY COURT
TO ONE YEAR IMPRISONMENT AND UP TO FIFTEEN LASHES.
THIS SHOW OF SEVERITY IS OBVIOUSLY MEANT DCKS AN OBJECT
LESSON. RAWLAPINDI WAS CALM ON MARCH 19 ALTHOUGH
HELMETED RIOT POLICE, AS WELL AS MP'S WITH MACHINE GUNS,
WERE STATIONED THROUGHOUT THE CITY.

2. CONGEN LAHORE REPORTS THAT THE CITY IS TENSE BUT SUBDUED; POLICE PATROLS HAVE INCREASED, AND ARMY UNITS ARE REPORTED STANDING BY. CONGEN KARACHI REPORTS THAT THE CITY IS NORMAL EXCEPT FOR ONE MINOR INCIDENT IN WHICH SEVERAL TIRES WERE BURNED. THE CONGEN HAS ALSO RECEIVED UNCONFIRMED RUMORS OF MILD, SCATTERED DISTURBANCES IN RURAL SIND. WE HAVE HEARD THAT STUDENTS BOYCOTTED CLASSES IN SEVERAL HYDERABAD COLLEGES AND THAT QUAID-I-AZAM UNIVERSITY IN ISLAMABAD WAS ALSO CLOSED FOR TWO HOURS BY A STUDENT STRIKE.

3. THERE ARE SEVERAL PROBABLE REASONS FOR THE MUTED REACTION TO THE VERDICT. SEVERAL HUNDRED PPP WORKERS HAVE BEEN ARRESTED DURING THE PAST FEW WEEKS, SO THE PARTY'S ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE--ESPECIALLY ITS LEADERSHIP--HAS BEEN CONSIDERABLY WEAKENED (REF B). THE MLA HAS ALSO MADE IT QUITE EVIDENT THAT IT WILL NOT HESITATE TO TAKE FIRM MEASURES AGAINST THOSE DEMONSTRATING AGAINST THE COURT DECISION.

4. THE COUNTRY ALSO KNOWS THAT THE LAST ACT IN THE DRAMA HAS NOT YET BEEN PLAYED OUT. THE CASE IS EXPECTED TO BE APPEALED TO THE SUPREME COURT, AND EXECUTIVE COMMUTATION OF THE SENTENCE IS ALSO POSSIBLE. WHILE THAT PROCESS COULD BE CONCLUDED IN A MATTER OF WEEKS, IT IS POSSIBLE IT COULD TAKE UP TO A COUPLE OF MONTHS FOR THE SC
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TO REACH A DECISION. FINALLY, BEGUM BHUTTO PROBABLY BELIEVES THE PPP CANNOT SUSTAIN NATIONWIDE STREET AGITATION IN THE FACE OF ARMY POWER FOR AN EXTENDED LENGTH OF TIME. SHE MAY CONSEQUENTLY BELIEVE THE PARTY SHOULD HOLD ITS FIRE AND NOT TAKE TO THE STREETS UNTIL A SUPREME COURT VERDICT IS EITHER IMMINENT OR ANNOUNCED.

5. LEGAL SITUATION- WE UNDERSTAND BHUTTO HAS SEVEN DAYS FROM THE DATE OF VERDICT TO APPEAR TO THE SUPREME COURT AND THAT THERE IS NO TIME LIMIT WITHIN WHICH THE COURT MUST DECIDE ON THE APPEAL. IF THE VERDICT AND THE SENTENCE OF THE HIGH COURT ARE UPHOLD, BHUTTO MAY APPEAL FOR CLEMENCY TO PRESIDENT CHAUDHRY, WHO HAS CONSTITUTIONAL AUTHORITY TO GRANT PARDON AND COMMUTE SENTENCES, WHETHER OR NOT AN APPEAL IS MADE. THE PRESIDENT IS REQUIRED BY THE CONSTITUTION TO ACT ONLY ON THE ADVICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER, HOWEVER. PRESIDENT CHAUDHRY MADE IT CLEAR TO AN AMERICAN JOURNALIST THAT HE WILL ACT ONLY ON THE ADVICE OF CHIEF MARTIAL LAW ADMINISTRATOR GENERAL ZIA.

6. AS A MATTER OF HISTORICAL INTEREST, ONLY ONE PROMINENT PAKISTANI POLITICIAN HAS EVER BEEN SENTENCED

TO DEATH, MAULANA MAUDOODI IN 1953. HIS SENTENCE WAS
COMMUTED FOLLOWING AN APPEAL BY THE KING OF SAUDI ARABIA.

7. POLITICAL SITUATION- THE MARTIAL LAW ADMINISTRATION
IS CONTINUING ITS MONTHLY BRIEFINGS OF POLITICAL LEADERS.
REPRESENTATIVES FROM THE PAKISTAN NATIONAL ALLIANCE AND
ASGHAR KHAN'S TEHRIQ ARE BEING BRIEFED THIS WEEK ON
ELECTION PROCEDURES AND MECHANICS. WE UNDERSTAND THAT
DURING THE BRIEFING, THE CMLA'S ADVISOR ON ELECTIOSNS,
LTGEN CHISHTI FLOATED YET AGAIN THE POSSIBILITY OF THE
PNA, WITH THE TEHRIQ, FORMING A NATIONAL GOVERNMENT. CHISHTI
REPORTEDLY SAID THAT THE MILITARY WANTS TO TURN POWER
OVER TO A CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT, BUT IT NEEDS THE COOPERATION
OF THE NON-PPP PARTIES TO DO SO. HE ADDED THAT IF A
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NATIONAL GOVERNMENT WERE FORMED, THE ARMY COULD EITHER
PARTICIPATE ACTIVELY, OR "STAY IN THE BACKGROUND", DEPENDING
ON THE WISHES OF THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT (CF. REF. C).

8. WE UNDERSTAND THE PARTY REPRESENTATIVES DID NOT RISE
TO THE BAIT.
HUMMEL

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